DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 240 872 FL 014 248

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TITLE The Use of Song in Class as an Important Stimulus in the Learning of a Language.
PUB DATE Mar 84
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southwest Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (Colorado Springs, CO, March 1-3, 1984).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; Cultural Education; Culture Contact; Learning Motivation; *Pattern Drills (Language); Phonetics; Recreational Activities; *Second Language Instruction; *Singing; Spanish; Speech Communication; *Student Interests; Student Participation; Syntax
IDENTIFIERS *Songs

ABSTRACT

Music awakens interest during language learning, and use of song can stimulate students to greater oral participation. Songs are universally enjoyed, break the day's monotony, and make repetition enjoyable. They also allow linguistic exercise in a noncompetitive situation and offer a more authentic linguistic experience than most classroom activities. Although beginning students respond to songs with enthusiasm, intermediate students benefit most because they know basic grammar but are often timid about oral participation. To create strong interest among students, complete analysis of the lyrics must be done and students must be given some background about the song and/or songwriter, with a list of vocabulary words. The use of song is an excellent way to practice Spanish phonetics, and songs can be found using the most troublesome sounds. Repetitive songs using all vowels are good for beginners, while those with more refined syntactic and grammatical structure develop linguistic and cultural sensitivity among more advanced students. A gradual rather than intensive exposure is most effective, introducing a new song about every two weeks. On the first day, students try to decipher the song's meaning. On the second day the lyrics and questions dealing with vocabulary, grammar, and meaning are distributed and discussed before hearing the song once more. Students sing together on the third day, and memorize it by the fourth. The greatest advantage of using song is that it creates a positive feeling for language learning. (MSE)

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The Use of Song In Class As An Important Stimulus In The Learning Of A Language

March 1984 Santiago Garcia-Saez

Lyrics and music reflect the sensitivity and the rich system of cultural and spiritual values of a nation. Song is also an important phenomenon in our own time. Music awakens a high degree of interest during the leaming of a new language, resulting in a new dimension of experience in the target language. The use of poetry and song as a part of the acquisition process can be a key in stimulating the student. From the use of these two elements arise cultural and linguistic advantages which will result in superior and more efficient oral participation.

Generally, since they contain human emotions and situations, songs are universally enjoyed. Songs also break the monotony of a student's daily routine. As well, in song, repetition is more enjoyable than in pattern drills since rhythm, melody, and emotional content play a vital role. The use of songs helps to create an atmosphere that is more relaxed and carefree; and, according to the Lozanov Method, facilitates learning: "Sit back comfortably in your armchairs. Relax! Try not to think of anything. . .If you can, forget that this is a lesson. The words will find their way of penetrating into your memory and they will remain there."[1] The student who has learned a song enjoys the satisfaction of having mastered a com-pletely linguistic exercise in a non-competitive situation. Besides, the student finds that music offers more of an authentic linguistic experience than the memorization of a dialogue. All work that can be

done through song will prove to be much less monotonous than the usual exercises from a textbook.

The use of music is something that all language instructors ought to explore. I use songs in my beginning classes just as I do in the intermediate sections. Beginning students always respond with enthusiasm since the use of song is something new in their language classroom. Intermediate students in general benefit most since they already know the basic concepts of grammar and they have tired of repetitive drills. These intermediate students want to improve their oral communication, but too frequently they fail to participate at all during the class session because they are timid. Discussions of passages in the text always present problems. On the other hand, the majority of students are familiar with music and they enjoy it.

Lack of contact with literature contributes in part to student apathy towards the literary texts of the language that is being studied. On the other hand, students are in constant contact with song and music. Since the majority understand the importance of popular music in their own lives, they can extend this appreciation to the music of other countries. As Kurt Kraetschmer argues in a provocative article dealing with the acquisition of a second language and its relationship to learning centers of the brain, "Multimodality and multisensory activities, such as dancing, singing, skits, cooking demonstrations, etc., can enhance considerbly a student's motivation by allowing him to integrate his personal interests into the learning process,"[2] In the case of Spanish song, Spain and Latin

America offer us a rich and varied repertoire of popular and folk music. The songs that will be studied in class need to be selected with a definite learning strategy in mind so that they will provide practice in vocabulary, verb forms, pronouns, pronunciation, and the acquisition of idiomatic expressions, as well as active oral participation.

To create strong interest among students, especially those at the intermediate level, a complete analysis of the lyrics must be done first. Then the students need to be given some information about the song as well as any biographical information available on the songwriter, all of which can be included in a section called "Commentary on the Song." The commentary should include a list of words that the students must learn, to be able to use in original phrases. The grammatical structure and style of the song can also be studied. I believe that it is essential to do this type of preparation since one cannot expect an intelligent and sensible reaction to the song if the students are asked to sing it immediately after hearing it for the first time.

One of the great benefits that I find in using song in elementary classes is that it encourages students to communicate orally and thus acquire a system of sounds. The use of song is an excellent way to practice Spanish phonetics. Songs that need to be used most are those that contain many sounds that the majority of students have trouble producing, such as t, r, rr, and c as consonant sounds, and the Spanish vowels. It is not at all difficult to find examples of such songs.

The songs that I prefer for beginners are De Colores and La Tarara de Sevilla. In both, the student practices all five vowel sounds, and the abundance of such sounds does not seem repetitious; quite the contrary, students enjoy repetition of these vowels and this repetition proves to be invaluable to the student in his learning of the language and its pronunciation. To practice the flap r, La Tarara can be used. To practice the double r (rr), Asserrín . . . can be used. The song's melody combined with the lyrics provide an excellent opportunity to review pronunciation and enjoy music at the same time. For beginners, the use of song is a refreshing, and surprisingly, pleasurable change. It provides a way for them to enjoy class and at the same time to learn the language without a great deal of effort.

Songs that have a more refined syntactical and grammatical structure can be used to develop the linguistic and cultural sensitivity of the student, for example, "Guantanamera". In explaining this song, inform the students that the lyrics are based on a poem by José Martí, Versos Sencillos (simple verses), and that a few years ago several Cubans in exile put music to certain stanzas and thus created this popular song, which has become a strong element in the Cuban folkloric tradition. Time permitting, the teacher can present a short discussion of Martí, known as one of the most outstanding representatives of Spanish culture, and his poetry which provides us with a vast field of values that reflects this culture. In his poetry we find themes of love, freedom, honour, sincerity, and loyalty to one's country.

By listening to "Guantanamera", the student learns that the choice of structure and words produces a very definite meaning. In our analysis of the lyrics we are discussing literature and we are also introducing the social dimension of the language. Once the student understands the content of the lyrics, he/she can repeat in his/her own words what he/she has understood. This helps develop within the student the concept as well as the use of correct grammar. As a specific example of this type of grammatical exercise in a song, I use "Las mañanitas", a Mexican song comparable to this country's "Happy Birthday". In "Las mañanitas", there are several examples of both direct and indirect objects, for example, "Te las cantamos a tí." After the students familiarize themselves with the song, I can begin an explanation of pronouns, secure in the knowledge that they will pay attention and, almost assuredly, learn more thoroughly.

At this point we may ask, "How do we teach the songs?" In general, I feel it is necessary to adopt a gradual approach. For example, one song every two weeks might be effective. We should strive for a situation where the students are asking to sing. In this way it will be less boring for the class. From five to eight minutes per lesson can be used for singing over a period of 4-5 days. Sometimes I use the language lab so that the songs can be heard, and so that the students can become familiar with the words and music. My experience is that the instructor himself has more influence than the tapes because of personal contact.

On the first day the instructor should have the students listen to the song and try to figure out its meaning. As an additional incentive, it

might be useful to have the students make a list of the words they do not know, if they are beginners. If they are more advanced, they should attempt to paraphrase in Spanish what they understand.

On the second day, the song, which includes questions dealing with vocabulary, grammar, and the meaning of the lyrics, is handed out. Once they understand everything. the students listen to the song once more, but now with the words in front of them. (Where a guitar cannot be used, a tape recorder can be used as a replacement.) The teacher should avoid displaying his own musical virtuosity. A song played live by an accomplished musican might cause the students to feel more uncomfortable than relaxed.

On the third day, the instructor asks the students to sing the song along with him. Singing together, the students get a new feeling of unity.

By the fourth day, the students should memorize the song. Following this method, my students learn from six to eight songs per semester. The themes of these songs are varied. Normally, I select songs that are linguistically and culturally rich, as long as they are not too difficult to learn. At the end of the semester, the outstanding students in this area might want to sing the songs in front of the class, to the Spanish club, or at a party. In general, I have noticed a great interest in Spanish music. In many instances, the students will buy records or tapes of Spanish music, or magazines that have articles about Hispanic songwriters and singers such as Julio Iglesias, Plácido Domingo, José Feliciano, José Rodríguez, José Perales, etc. The amount of interest shown by a class always determines

the type of project that can be undertaken. To be sure of the validity of these techniques, an evaluation of what has been done can be asked of the students after having studied the second song.

Goals to be pursued during this learning process in a new language are:

1. To make learning grammar a less painful experience through song.
2. To give a boost to memory exercises. In general it is accepted that the association of music with words makes the memorization process less difficult.
3. To improve pronunciation as well as a fluency in oral communication.
4. To present various cultural aspects of the Hispanic world.
5. To increase linguistic sensitivity.
6. To improve oral comprehension. The student concentrates in a special way listening to a song, wanting to get the most out of it, and this effort will help him with the spoken language.
7. To intensify the student's enthusiasm for analysis of poetry. Many find this exercise more interesting than any passage or lesson from the textbook.[3]

In conclusion, the greatest benefit that results from the use of song in language classes is that it creates an atmosphere that helps the student develop a positive attitude toward language learning. Taking into consideration the fact that many students do not continue the study of a

language past the second or third semester, we need to search for ways that will encourage students and show them the value of continuing.

NOTES

1. Dolores A. Schaefer in her study: "My Experiences with the Lozanov Method," Foreign Language Annals, 13, No. 4, (1980), pp. 273-78.
2. Kurt Kraetschmer: "Practical applications of current linguistic and psychological theories on second language acquisition", Applied Language Study: New Objectives, New Methods, ed. John Joseph. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1984. (pp. 223-29).
3. In several instances the goals listed here correspond to those cited by Marisa Gatti-Taylor in her study: "Songs as a Linguistic and Cultural Resource in the Intermediate Italian Class", Foreign Language Annals, No. 6 (1980), 465-68.

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